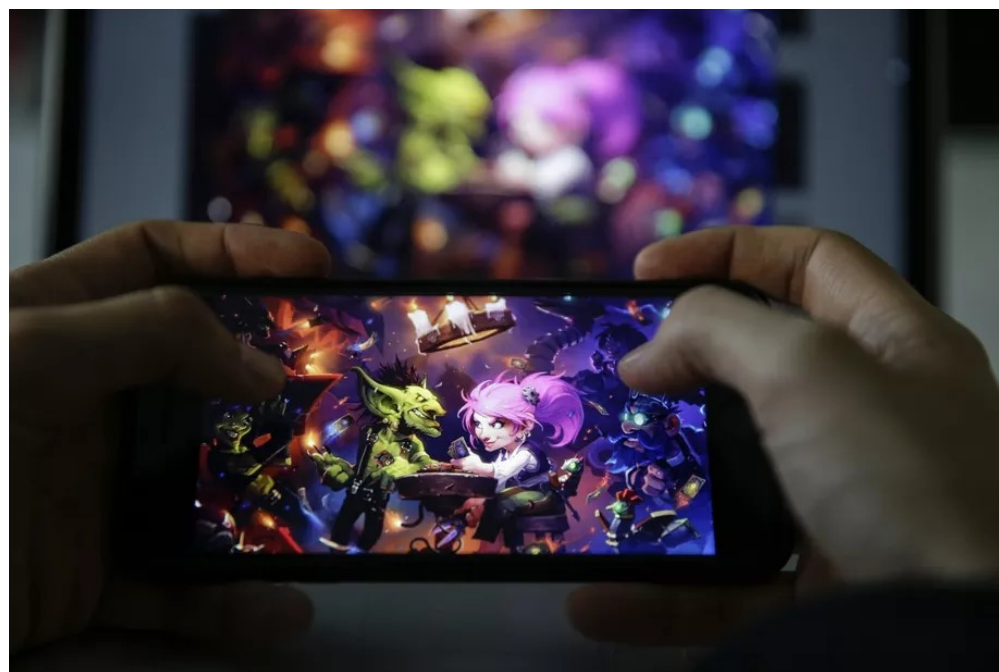


Blizzard is banning people in its Hearthstone Twitch chat for spamming pro-Hong Kong statements

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According to Blizzard, that's because of automated moderation

By Bijan Stephen | Oct 18, 2019, 4:25pm EDT



In February, Blizzard announced a new *Hearthstone* e-sports program, called the Masters Tour, to pit the game's best players against each other for a chance to win the acclaim of the internet (and potentially a lot of money). A European leg of the tour is currently happening in Bucharest, and you can catch the action over on [Twitch](#).

But there's a catch: anybody who posts anything pro-Hong Kong seems to be earning

an automatic 24-hour chat ban, as [reported](#) by *Dot Esports*. (On Twitch, a chat ban means that you can't post anything in a channel's chat for a certain amount of time; offenses and ban lengths are both specified by moderators.)

That said, the bans seem inconsistent. On Friday afternoon, over at the [@PlayHearthstone](#) Twitch channel, the chat filled up with pro-Hong Kong messages that didn't seem to be getting deleted. That might be because the channel was showing a rerun of an earlier match and the moderators weren't around to see what was happening. (A Blizzard esports spokesperson clarified that the bans were being triggered by spamming phrases in the channel's chat.)

There have been a series of massive protests in Hong Kong this summer, kicked off by the introduction of an extradition bill. As the summer went on, Hong Kong police escalated their use of force, deploying tear gas, bean bag rounds, and in some cases, live fire. At the same time, a number of US companies with interests in China have tried to discourage employees from speaking out in support of the protestors — most notably [in the case of the NBA](#).

Blizzard, whose games are big business in China, has run into similar issues. On October 8th, the company issued [a yearlong ban](#) to Ng “Blitzchung” Wai Chung, a prominent professional *Hearthstone* player from Hong Kong, after he said a pro-Hong Kong slogan in a post-game interview. (They also stripped him of his tournament winnings.) After a public outcry, Blizzard reduced the length of the ban by six months and reinstated his prize money — although a week later, the company [suspended three college *Hearthstone* players](#) for six months after they held up a sign that said “Free Hong Kong, Boycott Blizz” during an official competition stream.

At the time, Blizzard released a [statement](#) addressing the incident with Chung wherein its president, J. Allen Brack, wrote that the company's decisions weren't influenced by its (significant) business and relationships in China. “Moving forward, we will continue to apply tournament rules to ensure our official broadcasts remain focused on the game and are not a platform for divisive social or political views,” Brack wrote. With this latest Twitch policy, it appears that Blizzard is doubling down on its pro-China stance.

Across the industry, though, corporate reactions have been mixed. Riot Games, which publishes *League of Legends*, said broadcasters shouldn't talk about "sensitive topics" on air, referring to Hong Kong; Epic Games, on the other hand, said it wouldn't ban players or creators for political speech.

Update October 21st, 11:05AM ET: A Blizzard esports spokesperson clarified that the company is not banning people from its Hearthstone Twitch chat for using pro-Hong Kong speech specifically (or any other political statements); the bans have been triggered by an automated moderating system that catches viewers "spamming any phrase repeatedly."